Info@starklawlibrary.org

BEGINNERS   www.govtrack.us

The email address, info@starklaw library.org really works! TRY IT!!

Joshua Tauberer <http://taubz. for.net/>, a 22-year-old doctoral student in linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, has created a legislative tracking service called "GovTrack.us: Knowledge about government is power" which he describes as: "a nexus of information about the United States Congress." [1] Mr. Tauberer, a self-taught Web programmer, came up with the idea for GovTrack as a freshman psychology major at Princeton. [2]

His Technorati Developer's Contest award winning, automated monitoring service, located at <http:// www.govtrack.us/> is free! With his service registered users can track:

- bills,
- issues or committees,
- representatives, or
- topics.

Daily or weekly email updates are available, as well as news feeds. The site also includes blog postings on legislation. His data comes from THOMAS <http://thomas.loc.gov/>, the official website for the status of legislation at the Library of Congress, and the U.S. Senate <http://www.

senate.gov/> and U.S. House <http:// www.house.gov/> websites, the official sources for voting records. The committee hearing schedule is obtained through this Senate page <http://www. senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/ b_three_sections_with_teasers/ committee_hearings.htm> and THOMAS's daily digest, for the House.[3]

I particularly enjoyed the following "Statistics Nutshell:"

"These representatives are the most . . .

Absent: Sen. Kerry [D-MA] (66% votes missed)
Successful: Rep. Young [R-FL] (60 bills enacted)
Unsuccessful: Rep. Andrews [D-NJ] (100% of 280 bills died)
Talkative: Rep. Blumenauer [D-OR] (34 speeches)" [4]

GovTrack's long-term mission is to be

one step in a process that will change the way we deal with information about our government. The next steps are to create more tools, based on *free & open information*, for participating in politics, and from there creating a semantic web of political information. [5]

INTERMEDIATE   PDF Please

When you are researching online with Westlaw or LEXIS, do you print out a promising case to read off-line or have it e-mailed to yourself as a word processing document?

If you are new to the topic, let me give you a little background information. PDF, short for Portable Document Format, will allow you to save, print or send word processing documents that look exactly how you intended, prevent anyone from making any changes to them and eliminate your metadata worries. All you need to get started are:

- Netscape Navigator version 4.6, 4.7, 7.0 or 7.1 (Netscape 6 is not recommended for use with CM/ECF) or Internet Explorer 5.5 or 6.0.
- Software to convert documents from a word processor format to portable document format (PDF). (PDFWriter by Adobe is recommended.)
- Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is freely available, is needed for viewing PDF documents.
- A scanner may be necessary to create electronic images of documents that are not in your word processing system. [6]

Being new to the topic, you may need a little expert help. PDF for Lawyers at <http://www.pdfforlawyers.com/> is a blog created with you in mind. Use the "categories" list to hone in on your search for knowledge. Additional resources include:

- **Acrobatics with Adobe** <http://www.masterslawfirm.com/CLE-Articles/AcrobaticsAdobe.htm>
- **Adobe Acrobat Family Page** <http://www. adobe.com/products/acrobat/main.html>

- **Adobe for Lawyers** <http://www.llrx.com/features/adobeforlawyers.htm>
- **PDFZone.com** <http://www.pdfzone.com>
- **Planet PDF** <http://www.planetpdf.com> and
- **Status of Electronic Filing in Federal Courts** <http://www.uscourts.gov/cmecf/cmecf_about.html>. [7]

When you are researching online with Westlaw or LEXIS, do you print out a promising case to read off-line or have it e-mailed to yourself as a word processing document? If your answer is yes, you need to rethink your actions. Is it just habit? Why not use PDF so that you will be able to FAX or e-mail your case to your co-counsel, partner or client and be sure that anyone can read it and that you are all on the same page (a common problem when different word processing programs save a document). "Keeping information in digital form is the road to efficiency and rapid transmission." [8]

Other reasons for using Acrobat include a wonderful indexing feature that will allow you to quickly search across all the PDF files on your hard drive, a binding feature that combines many differ-ent applications into a single PDF and the ability to allow everyone involved in your case to annotate with comments with familiar tools such as electronic sticky notes or highlighters, using either Adobe Reader 7.0 (free) or the full version of Acrobat.

ADVANCE   IM Anyone?

What's faster than e-mail (you DON'T have to wait till your contact gets around to checking his mailbox) and telephone (you WON'T get caught with a talker)?

A 2004 Pew Internet & American Life survey found that more than four in ten online Americans instant message (IM). Of the roughly 53 million adults who use instant messaging programs, about 11 million of them use it at work. These business users are cited as liking the manner in which it "encourages productivity and interoffice cooperation." [9]

The Webopedia defines IM thusly:

> Short for *instant message*, a type of communications service that enables you to create a kind of private chat room with another individual in order to communicate in real time over the Internet, analagous to a telephone conversation but using text-based, not voice-based, communication. Typically, the instant messaging system alerts you whenever somebody on your private list is online. You can then initiate a chat session with that particular individual. [10]

Do you ever secretly hope that the person you are calling via telephone will NOT be in so you can leave a brief message on their voice-mail? That's IM at it's best - you always get the person that you want (no secretaries, unless that *is* who you want), plus, you can skip the chit-chat and you get right back to the work at hand.

Besides being faster than e-mail (you have to wait till your contact gets around to checking his mailbox) or telephone (you may get caught with a talker), other pluses include:

- the avoidance of spam and telemarketers
- the ability to send files without worrying about the size limitations for e-mail attachments
- the newer clients support video conferencing and VoIP
- there has been some progress in adding new features to IM. AOL (one of the key players in the market) is working towards a new way to manage news and stock alerts and take advantage of Yellow Page listings [11]

Next month we will delve into the drawbacks of using IM in your practice.

FOOTNOTES

[1&5] GovTrack.us: Knowledge about government is power. 7 February 2005. <http://www.govtrack.us/>.

[2] Terdiman, Daniel. " How Did They Vote? Updates by E-Mail of Congressional Ayes and Nays." GovTrack.us: Knowledge about government is power. 7 February 2005. <http://www.govtrack.us/articles/20050126nyt.xpd>.

[3] Pacifici, Sabrina I. "Innovative Legislative Tracking Tool Now Available." beSpacific: Accurate, Focused Law and Technology News. 19 January 2005. BeSpacific LLC. 7 February 2005. <http://www.bespacific.com/mt/archives/007333.html#7333>.

[4] GovTrack.us: Knowledge about government is power. 7 February 2005. <http://www.govtrack.us/> (Click on "Representatives").

[6] CM/ECF: Case Management/Electronic Case Files." U.S. Courts. 16 February 2005. <http://www. uscourts.gov/cmecf/cmecf_userinfo.html>

[7] Kennedy, Dennis. "Putting PDF and Adobe Acrobat into Your Tech Toolbox." Law Practice Today. May 2004. ABA. 16 February. <http://www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt/articles/slc05041.html>.

[8] Svenson, Ernest. "Acrobat for Online Legal Research." Ernie the Attorney. 17 February 2005. <http://radio.weblogs.com/0104634/Online%20Legal%20Research.html>.

[9] .Lenhart, Amanda. "How Americans Use Instant Messaging." Reports: Online Activities & Pursuits. 9 January 2004. Pew Internet & American Life Project. 10 February 2005. <http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/133/report_display.asp>.

[10] "IM." Webopedia. 2004. Internet.com 14 February 2005. <http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/I/IM.html>.

[11] Bass, Steve. "IM is More Than Chatting: Check Out the Latest News and Tools for this Maturing Technology." Steve Bass's Tips & Tweaks. 8 December 2004. PC World. 15 February 2005. <http://www.pcworld.com/resource/printable/article/0,aid,118621,00.asp>.

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